

Ninth Annual Northeast Texas Poetry Reading



(Above Winners: Cailee Davidson, Zachary Miguez, Angela Wylie, Chesney Davis, and Adriana Rodriguez)

The ninth annual Northeast Texas Poetry Reading, 2 September, at the Whatley Foyer of Northeast Texas Community College evoked a broad range of emotions. Nostalgia was high on the list as student-winner, Presidential Scholar, Chesney Davis, sounded a keynote: “East Texas is as big as it is little.” Commentators such as Sid Hicks of Mount Vernon and Dr. Jerry Wesson of Mount Pleasant recalled the big-hearted traditions of small town life. Hicks referred to the last cotton farmer leaving Franklin County in the 1970s, ending a tradition that had stretched a century-and-a-half. Wesson recalled old folks saying not that someone was “fat” but “over-big;” not that someone was just “tight,” but that “he hadn’t spent his first-grade lunch money yet.”

Davis’ poem, enunciated in a soft southern accent, luxuriated in picturesque vignettes of Northeast Texas life--the salt mines of Mineola, “small town throw downs,” and coffee black enough “to float a bullet.” Another type of nostalgia emerged with the poem of the adult winner, Angela Wylie of Winnsboro. Wylie, now referred

to as the “Poet Laureate of Northeast Texas” has won the adult division of this contest now in 2009, 2011, 2015 and now 2016. She has gloried in ruins of the region, in places where the fabled past meets the resilience and ebullience of nature. Her “The Fence” glories in images of posts “silvered soft by the sun,” and wire engulfed by a wrapping wild rose.

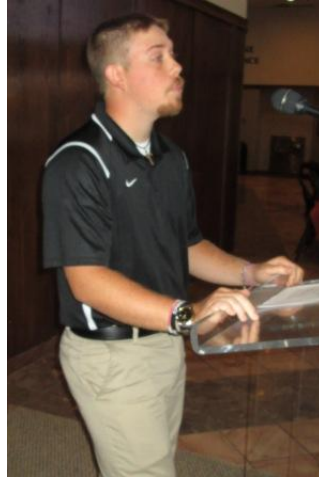
The second- and third-place student winners again showed our regional fascination for powerful storms, a motif in several of the other submitted works. Sophomore Presidential Scholar, Cailee Davidson, the 2015 student winner, noted how “soft clouds [turn] . . . more menacing, “rolling, roaring, shadowing the ground below.” Presidential Scholar, Adriana Rodriguez compared the bliss after the storm with the serenity of the region.

Zachary Miguez, fourth-place student winner, was the first poet in some time to delve into controversial past social issues, pounding the lectern rhythmically as he described “the cracking of whips,” and “burning of crosses,” days of darkness that still “intrude” on his dreams.”

Cynthia Needham of Pittsburg was the Second-place adult winner, with a poem about “Neverland.” Nine-year old Korden Johnson read his poem and won a special mention for outscoring several contestants his senior. Dr. Chuck Hamilton, English Professor at NTCC, chaired the meeting.

The Winning Poems are as follows. Each poet signed a waiver allowing the local press to print their poems:

First Place Student, \$400 Chesney Davis from Pittsburg



East Texas is as Big as it is Little

From the rolling hills of Tyler
To the open grass lands of Daphne Prairie
From the Cypress swamps of Uncertain
To the Salt mines of Mineola
From the tall pine forest that stretch from end to end
To the deep lakes that dot the landscape

East Texas is as big as it is little

From the scalding hot summers that burn everything in sight
To the freezing winters that chill your inner soul
From the don't mess with Texas attitude
To the sweet southern hospitality that calls this place home
From the tea that makes your heart too sweet
To the coffee black enough to float a bullet

East Texas is as big as it is little

From good ole Big Tex
To the cowboy hatted Eiffel Tower
From the Ezekiel Airship of Pittsburg
To the canoes of the Caddo Indians
From the roaring crowds of Cowboy Stadium
To the bright lights of Friday nights

East Texas is as big as it is little

From massive state fairs
To small town throw-downs
From monstrous big city schools
To little bitty rural homes
From giant booming urban factories
To the tiny just getting by family farms

East Texas is a big as it is little

From the “everything is bigger in Texas”
To little bitty home towns all over this great region
East Texas has it all

East Texas is as big as it is little

Student Second Place: Cailee Davidson from Upshur County



Summer Storm

Heat waves visible to the naked eye,
Blurring the view of the landscape,
Hayfields browned under the summer sun,
Grass crunched underneath the feet of the heat-struck cattle,
Creek beds lined with cracks,
Waiting to be filled by a summer shower.
Flora and fauna alike thirst for a cool drink,
Only the memory of rain is what has kept them alive.

There is hope.
Giant clouds can be seen to the west,
Moving in to quench the thirst of the earth.
The smell of rain, sweet and welcomed,
Is a sign of new life and growth.
The rain, starting gently at first,
Scatters drops on the parched earth in a falling mist,
Teasing,

Only letting on what is yet to come.
Leaves of flowers turn upward to soak in the life-bringing liquid;
Tree roots yearn for a cool drink;
All life waits in anticipation for the summer storm.
Suddenly, the soft clouds seem more menacing -
Dark, rolling, roaring,
Shadowing the ground below,
Warning all life to take shelter,
Holding on until the last moment to release what has been built
up.

Then, suddenly, all is released.
Millions of gallons fall to the earth,
Soaking everything in their path.
Low ponds swell to the brim, threatening to overflow;
Crappie and bass jump for joy at the expansion of their homes.
Blue jays and mockingbirds take shelter in the thick oaks,
Waiting for the great storm to subside.

Farmers say a thank you prayer,
Knowing, now, their crops have a chance to flourish.
Dry, cracked earth soaks in as much as possible,
Knowing this may be the last chance for a while.
Every living thing is thankful.

As all things, the storm must come to an end.

Raindrops become less threatening,
Softer, quieter,
Misting the earth below.
Animals emerge from their hiding places,
Enjoying the cool, clean air.
Limbs droop under their new weight,
As if sighing in relief.

Yet another miracle appears to show God's grace -
The shimmering colors of a beautiful rainbow,
Reminding of the promise made so long ago.

Third Place: Adriana Rodriguez of Mount Pleasant



After a Storm

Rolling dark clouds vanquish the sunny day
Thunder pierces the long lasting silence

The countryside is misted with wet hay
And the land shakes with enraging violence

People walk along those empty dirt roads
Their cowboy boots caked with layers of earth

Staring into the prairie, all time slowed
And the end of the storm marked a rebirth

Sunlight peaked from behind a fearsome cloud

Miles of green pastures glistened with dew

Bright red cardinals proudly sang aloud

I then realized, this peace was nothing new

Even after the terror of a storm

This blissful peace is what I've always known

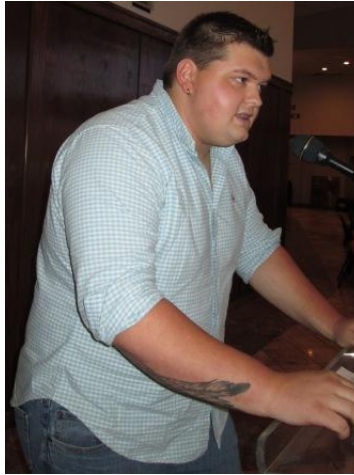
Even after the sky took a new form

Here, I will never have to be alone

This place stays quiet, yet very pleasant

No leaving, not even for a second

Fourth Place Student Winner Zachary Migues



Telltale susurrations of a northern wind
cause the bluebonnets to sway in a meadow
cause the leaves to whisper in a live oak tree
which casts its noble shadow across a burbling creek.
The hand of Gaea strokes across a verdant hay field
as Apollo radiates from out of the blue clear sky.
I walk beneath the shadow of ramrod pines,
my boots tread soft and quiet upon their needles.
Rabbits speed through the brush, seeking their warrens.
White-tail buck, resplendent, their antlers scraped of velvet.
Brief flashes of scarlet, as the cardinals flit among the boughs.
The clean scent of cedar fills my nostrils as I stroll about.
Returning to my home, I pass scenes of pastoral beauty,
cattle grazing the rich grass and crops thrusting toward the sky
with the Lone Star flag waving above this gorgeous land.
I lay my head down upon my pillow, shutting my eyes,
beatific thoughts of my walk dance within my brain.
As my eyes close, and consciousness flees, darkness
intrudes upon my dreams, nightmares sprung from the past.
I saw haunting visions of burning crosses,
I heard the malevolent cracking of whips,
I saw black hands picking white cotton,
I heard white men cheer as black men hanged,

I saw brother against brother, gray versus blue,
I heard women scream as they were slaughtered,
I saw children spitted on gleaming cavalry sabers,
I heard the wicked laugh as fire consumed it all.
Awakening, sweat beading on my forehead,
my breath coming in great, heaving gasps,
I felt rage coursing hot through my veins.
In my own mind, I railed against injustice,
and I screamed out for due penance,
I cried out, hoping someone would hear.
And hear they did, as I turned to face the present.
Because the past is something to be learned from,
and while there is much that can be fixed,
I still retain my hope for a brighter future.
For of a friday, when two teams play on the gridiron.
I see all races and creeds turn out to watch a game,
and in this, there are no petty squabbles of hatred,
only people, just human beings, enjoying themselves.
And this, this cooperation is what gives me hope.

I am reminded too, of those bluebonnets swaying,
and of red dirt roads coursing through the backwoods,
of the dust my tires kick up as I tear them down.
I am reminded of the pink, red, and orange sunset,
watching that star sink as I turn on my stereo,
and the taste of a cold beer by a crackling fire.
I am reminded of how her lip gloss tasted,
and her hand in mine as we danced in the meadow
whilst Selene poured down her stannic rays.

I wouldn't trade a single memory
for all of King Midas's gold.
I'll take the bad with the good,
but that's what life's about isn't it.
Everything is shades of gray,
and this gray is my favorite shade.
This place is ever and always my home,
no matter where the road takes me,
my spirit will rest under the
blossoms of a dogwood tree,
and in the shadow of a live oak,

and in the music of the wind!
as it sways the bluebonnets.

First Place Adult, Angela Wylie of Winnsboro



They line the varied North-East Texas land, strung
Along roads paved by blacktop, gravel, or concrete lanes
Stretching in straight lines across both
Field and forest, these man-made barriers
Constructed to hold in and be binding,
In a line, weary and rusted, or new and sharp-shining.
Through the fence, man seeks to rule.

In the rural areas where land
Has long been held unsold and undivided
The fences are old - weathered and worn.
Made of bois d'arc, cedar, or oak
Holding stiff, brittle wire, they guard acres and plots,
Running into infinity, or making off yards and lots,
Where man-claimed beasts are constrained.

The old posts are narrow and thin,
Bare skeletons of what they once were.
Reduced now to the hardened central core
Of the small tree that was cut and cut again,
Then planted in deep into the ground.
The rich dirt filled in and tamped down.
The now lifeless posts placed straight.

They are silvered soft by the sun
Ridged into deep grooves by wind
Knotty and slim, some broken and leaning
Remaining where they were purposefully placed,
No longer flowing with life-giving sap
No longer nourished by deep, eager root's wrap
Rootless and leafless they stand sentry in the deep soil.

There they yet hold up the wicked barbed wire.
Wire that signifies and proclaims ownership.
Wire that protects from other human encroachment.
Some places tight in – in others, sagging slack
As staples loosen and fall from the weakening wooden loess
Or as living trees intermingle with the skeletal posts,
Wire stretching taunt with their enthusiastic growth

The fences are home to wild willful weeds,
Bounding briars, and scraggly scrub trees,

Which have found a sheltered place to grow.
A place where man does not cut or spray
A place where animals pace, their freedom lost
A place where Wilderness in glorious chaos
Claims a narrow stretch stolen from the intent of man.

Pungent cedar and spreading plum engulf the wire
Weathered wood is wrapped about with
Rank resin-weed and thorny tickle-tongue.
Wild rose engulfs the wire, an encroaching glorious
Burden weighing down with riotous twisting vine,
And bright fragrant pink blossom so divine
Offering nectar to bees and nests to birds

With no regard to brief and errant man's labor
Nature seizes hold and claims for Herself
The narrow stretches of brittle wire and warped wood
Bringing forth a vibrant sanctuary for bird and bug
And thus what man seeks to claim and hold
Is surrendered to teeming lives untold,
Virile and insistently wild, refusing man's control.

Second Place Adult, Cynthia Needham of Pittsburg

Neverland Calling Out to Me

Or, the Trip to Grandma's House

Long trip, 312 some odd miles

Riding in the dark

Entertaining my boy child

Neverland plays on the radio

Reality is so real

Neverland, a whimsical place

Calling out to me

Adults too, have dreams

Hard work on every side

One day dreams will be

My reality

But not today, you see

Neverland is calling me

Grandma's house among the pines

Hot, steamy summer days

Garage sales, thrift stores

Shop, shop, shop

No fun for my child in that

This tiredness is reality

Neverland, a distant dream

Watching fireflies in the night

Flashing slow or flashing fast

"Attractive ones flash fast,"

Says my boy of nine

Down the drive beside the trees

Fireflies flirting on the edge

A light stays on

Son, look, over there

Glowing beside us as we go

A fairy, perhaps accompanies

Tiny lantern glowing

In Neverland, perhaps

Remembering the fairy light

Within the night

Seems distant

As the new day dawns

Help me pick up these rocks

So I can mow the lawn

No fun for my child or for me

More of reality

Put the rocks in this pail

Do you want the pretty ones?

What is this?

Could it be?

Tiny snail, tiny shell

Pick them up on a leaf

Magical world among the trees

Hearts brighten remembering the sight

Tiny, magical, like last night

Little toadstools, fairy homes

Imaginings, in this place

Time to go

Long trip home

312 some odd miles

Boredom at the long drive

And then

Neverland plays on the radio

Brings a smile to my face

Reality is so real

Neverland a whimsical place

Calling out to me

